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Unpolitical man asks for trouble running Soviet dissident fund

By Anthony Barbieri, Jr.
Moscow Bureau of The Sun

Moscow — Andrei Kistyakovski is a 46-year-old translator of English and American literature, a soft-spoken man with sandy hair and a drooping mustache who does not seem prone to acts of bravery or folly.

Yet at a time when the authorities are in the midst of a sharp crackdown on the administrators of the Russian Fund to Aid the Families of Soviet Political Prisoners, Mr. Kistyakovski has stepped forward to offer his services in a role that can only be described as dangerous.

The fund — known as the Solzhenitsyn Fund because it is largely supported by the royalties of the exiled writer Alexander I. Solzhenitsyn — distributes financial assistance to the families of imprisoned dissidents. It is estimated that since the fund was set up by Mr. Solzhenitsyn in 1974 after his forced exile, the families of more than 1,000 such prisoners have been aided.

The Soviet authorities, however, have branded the fund a front financed and run by the Central Intelligence Agency and have moved harshly against those who have emerged, one by one, to help run it in the Soviet Union.

Its current administrator, Sergei Khodorovich, was arrested April 7 and is in jail awaiting charges and trial. A 32-year-old Leningrad man named Valery Repin who distributed money on behalf of the fund is being given a highly publicized trial at which he has confessed to treason, a crime carrying the death penalty.

The first administrator of the fund was Alexander Ginzburg, a well-known dissident and human-rights activist who was sentenced to eight years in prison in 1977 and was sent to the West as part of a prisoner swap in 1979. The three Soviet dissidents who helped to manage the fund after that were all either exiled or forced to emigrate.

Into this thicket now steps Mr. Kistyakovski, who says he has never been "any kind of activist," does not consider himself to be a dissident, and has never even met Mr. Solzhenitsyn.

Indeed, Mr. Solzhenitsyn and his wife, Natalya, have been very cautious about whom they designate to administer the fund,

and it is not even known if they are aware of Mr. Kistyakovski's offer to take over or whether they will approve it once they become aware.

"Yes," he conceded, "it's dangerous."

Mr. Kistyakovski, who is working on a translation of Joseph Heller's "Catch-22," said he was motivated by a commitment to his friend, Mr. Khodorovich, to carry on the fund's work, by what he calls "the dictates of conscience" and by a Christian faith he shares with Mr. Solzhenitsyn.

"I don't want to be arrested," he said yesterday in an interview in his sparsely furnished study. "Yes, I think about it, and I don't think I am afraid. I hope I won't be arrested ... but there are some things more important than one's personal freedom."

Despite the authorities' crackdown on the fund and the treason trial in Leningrad, Mr. Kistyakovski said that arrest would surprise him because he is doing nothing wrong under Soviet law.

"They say it is an espionage organization.

It is not an espionage organization," he said. "No one broke the law. Never."

He said that as a charitable organization set up to help those who cannot help themselves, the fund follows a long Russian tradition "of Christian help to people, mainly children and old people."

Mr. Solzhenitsyn established the fund in 1974 and dedicated the royalties from "The Gulag Archipelago," his classic study of Soviet political prisons and prisoners, to support it.

At a press conference in 1978, Natalya Solzhenitsyn was reported to have said that the fund's assets, deposited in Switzerland, were close to \$2 million and that, at that time, between 700 and 1,000 families had been aided.

Other reports at the time said that the fund distributed about 90,000 rubles (\$120,000) yearly and that between 25 percent and 40 percent of the money came from Soviet citizens inside the Soviet Union.

Mr. Solzhenitsyn has relied on trusted associates in the Soviet Union to administer the fund. Although some people involved with the fund try to keep their identities secret to avoid official attention, others do not. The administrator's name is always well known in dissident circles and, presumably, to the KGB, the security police.

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